





## Inside the Supermax

Victims of violence get a rare personal look at the dead-end life of the state's worst offenders

By Gus G. Sentementes | Sun reporter

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For Phyllis Bricker, a rare tour yesterday through the Supermax prison - where her parents' killer is housed on death row - was the latest step in a painful odyssey as she awaits an execution that has been on hold for years.

"My parents are gone, and he's still here," Bricker said while standing inside the fortified building north of downtown, at the state prison complex on East Madison Street.

For Lisa Spicknall, whose husband killed their two children in 1999 and was later slain by another inmate in prison in Jessup, there was some relief. Though her husband was never at Supermax, she was relieved to see that prison isn't a place where inmates are coddled.

"It does us good to know that it's not a life of luxury and they don't get all kinds of privileges," said Spicknall, who stills grieves for her children. "Their lives are definitely altered and changed."

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The women were among a small group of crime victims - many of them grieving for murdered family members - who came to the maximum-security complex that houses some of the most violent and worst-behaved prisoners. They toured the stark corridors with victims' rights advocates and state corrections officials as part of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, which begins Monday.

This year, state corrections officials decided to give victims and the media a glimpse inside a world that is normally closed off from the public and hidden behind steel doors, concrete walls and razor wire. Warden John S. Wolfe and his security chief led the group through what is formally called the Maryland Correctional Adjustment Center.

Another nickname for the prison is "The Cave," Wolfe said. Deep inside the facility - with its tiny narrow windows, small cells and compartmentalized hallways with heavy steel doors that clang shut - the outside world seems far away.

Debbie Neighoff, the victim services coordinator for the Division of Correction, told the group before the tour that the agency organizes such events to "create a supportive environment where victims feel they're a part of our system."

"The DOC even has a small program where crime victims are able to speak to inmates who hurt or killed a family member. There's nothing like a victim telling their story to an inmate," Neighoff said.

Yesterday's visitors had no contact with the prisoners. They were taken through a security checkpoint, the men were given white paper bracelets to distinguish them from the all-male population and cell phones were confiscated.

It quickly became apparent that Supermax is unlike any other prison. There was no dining room to tour because inmates receive their meals on trays passed through slots in their green metal doors. They are typically allowed out of their cells for only one hour each day.

Supermax is the only institution in the state to house death row inmates, and five of the 160 prisoners are awaiting execution. The visitors were taken to death row. John Booth-El, one of two men who killed Bricker's parents, is there, though he and the other inmates could not be seen.

The only time the group saw inmates was when they milled about an enclosed outdoor recreation area, which has a basketball court. Across a courtyard, two men in orange jumpsuits were being held in another fenced area. Inmates who could peek out of small, narrow slotted windows in their cell doors saw the group and started yelling.

Over the noise, Phyllis Bricker, 77, and her husband, Bill, 85, once again told the story of how her parents died. Rose and Irvin Bronstein were in their own home when it was robbed on May 18, 1983. The couple were bound and stabbed.

Phyllis Bricker brought a yellowed photo of her parents to Supermax and railed against a criminal justice system that sentenced their killer to death but, 25 years later, still hadn't carried out the sentence because of a lengthy appeals process. There is now a de facto moratorium.

"It just kind of brings me back," Bricker said while walking through the prison, knowing her parents' killer was close by. "I don't know what it is. ... "

Lisa Spicknall, who is now a victim advocate with [Mothers Against Drunk Driving](#), came with her mother, Peggy Fields.

Her husband, Richard Spicknall, had never been held at Supermax. But the man who killed him inside a Jessup prison in 2006 is there. Lawrence Joseph Lannin had previously been convicted twice of first-degree murder and given a sentence of life without parole.

He pleaded guilty last year to strangling Richard Spicknall in December 2006 and was given a third life-without-parole sentence. "I want to shake his hand," Fields said.

At the end of the tour, the group got a chance to talk with prison officials. Sharon Thompson told

of her experience confronting her brother's killer as part of the Victim-Offender Dialogue Program.

"I showed him autopsy pictures, the gravesite," said Thompson, 43. "I let him know the path of destruction he left behind. ... He apologized to me for all the pain.

"I highly recommend this program," she said. "I don't cry as much anymore. I don't have nightmares."

[gus.sentementes@baltsun.com](mailto:gus.sentementes@baltsun.com)

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